

UNITED STATES PATENT APPLICATION FOR:

PROFILED ENCAPSULATION FOR USE WITH
INSTRUMENTED EXPANDABLE TUBULAR COMPLETIONS

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PROFILED ENCAPSULATION FOR USE WITH INSTRUMENTED EXPANDABLE TUBULAR COMPLETIONS

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Field of the Invention

[0001] The present invention relates to expandable sand screens and other expandable tubulars. More particularly, the present invention relates to a profiled encapsulation for use with an expandable sand screen or other expandable downhole apparatus. The profiled encapsulation houses instrumentation lines or control lines in a wellbore.

Description of Related Art

[0002] Hydrocarbon wells are typically formed with a central wellbore that is supported by steel casing. The steel casing lines the borehole formed in the earth during the drilling process. This creates an annular area between the casing and the borehole, which is filled with cement to further support and form the wellbore.

[0003] Some wells are produced by perforating the casing of the wellbore at selected depths where hydrocarbons are found. Hydrocarbons migrate from the formation, through the perforations, and into the cased wellbore. In some instances, a lower portion of a wellbore is left open, that is, it is not lined with casing. This is known as an open hole completion. In that instance, hydrocarbons in an adjacent formation migrate directly into the wellbore where they are subsequently raised to the surface, possibly through an artificial lift system.

[0004] Open hole completions carry the potential of higher production than a cased hole completion. They are frequently utilized in connection with horizontally drilled boreholes. However, open hole completions present various risks concerning the integrity of the open wellbore. In that respect, an open hole leaves aggregate material, including sand, free to invade the wellbore. Sand production can result in premature failure of artificial lift and other downhole and surface equipment. Sand can build up in the casing and tubing to obstruct well flow. Particles can compact and erode

surrounding formations to cause liner and casing failures. In addition, produced sand becomes difficult to handle and dispose at the surface. Ultimately, open holes carry the risk of complete collapse of the formation into the wellbore.

[0005] To control particle flow from unconsolidated formations, well screens are often employed downhole along the uncased portion of the wellbore. One form of well screen recently developed is the expandable sand screen, designated by the Assignee as ESS[®]. In general, the ESS is constructed from three composite layers, including a filter media. The filter media allows hydrocarbons to invade the wellbore, but filters sand and other unwanted particles from entering. The sand screen is connected to production tubing at an upper end and the hydrocarbons travel to the surface of the well via the tubing. The sand screen is expanded downhole against the adjacent formation in order to preserve the integrity of the formation during production.

[0006] A more particular description of an expandable sand screen is described in U.S. Patent No. 5,901,789, which is incorporated by reference herein in its entirety. That patent describes an expandable sand screen which consists of a perforated base pipe, a woven filtering material, and a protective, perforated outer shroud. Both the base pipe and the outer shroud are expandable, and the woven filter is typically arranged over the base pipe in sheets that partially cover one another and slide across one another as the sand screen is expanded, or is expanded directly. The expanded tubular or tool can then be expanded by a cone-shaped object urged along its inner bore or by an expander tool having radially outward extending rollers that are fluid powered from a tubular string. Using expansion means like these, the expandable tubular or tool is subjected to outwardly radial forces that urge the expanding walls against the open formation or parent casing. The expandable components are stretched past their elastic limit, thereby increasing the inner and outer diameter of the tubular.

[0007] A major advantage to the use of expandable sand screen in an open wellbore like the one described herein is that once expanded, the annular area between the screen and the wellbore is mostly eliminated, and with it the need for a gravel pack. Typically, the ESS or other solid expandable tubular is expanded to a point where its

outer wall places a stress on the wall of the wellbore, thereby providing support to the walls of the wellbore to prevent dislocation of particles. Solid expandable tubulars are oftentimes used in conjunction with an expandable sand screen to provide a zonal isolation capability.

[0008] In modern well completions, the operator oftentimes wishes to employ downhole tools or instruments. These include sliding sleeves, submersible electrical pumps, downhole chokes, and various sensing devices. These devices are controlled from the surface via hydraulic control lines, electrical control lines, mechanical control lines, fiber optics and/or a combination thereof. For example, the operator may wish to place a series of pressure and/or temperature sensors every ten meters within a portion of the hole, connected by a fiber optic control line. This line would extend into that portion of the wellbore where an expandable sand screen or other solid expandable tubular or tool has been placed.

[0009] In order to protect the control lines or instrumentation lines, the lines are typically placed into small metal tubings which are affixed external to the expandable tubular and the production tubing within the wellbore. In addition, in completions utilizing known non-expandable gravel packs, the control lines have been housed within a metallic rectangular cross-sectioned container. However, this method of housing control lines or instrumentation downhole is not feasible in the context of the new, expandable completions now being offered.

[0010] First, the presence of control lines behind an expandable tubular interferes with an important function, which is to provide a close fit between the outside surface of the expandable tubular, and the formation wall. The absence of a close fit between the outside surface of the expandable tubular and the formation wall creates a vertical channel outside of the tubular, allowing formation fluids to migrate between formations therein. This, in turn, causes inaccurate pressure, temperature, or other readings from downhole instrumentation, particularly when the well is shut in for a period of time, or may provide a channel for erosive wear.

[0011] There is a need, therefore, for an encapsulation for control lines or instrumentation lines which is not rectangular in shape, but is profiled so as to allow a

close fit between an expandable tubular and a formation wall or parent casing. There is further a need for an encapsulation which resides between the outside surface of an expandable and the formation wall, and which does not leave a vertical channel outside of the expandable tubular when it is expanded against the formation wall. Still further, there is a need for such an encapsulation device which is durable enough to withstand abrasions incurred while being run into the wellbore, but which is sufficiently deformable as to be deformed in arcuate fashion as to closely reside between an expanded tubular and the wall of a wellbore, whether cased or open.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0012] The present invention provides an encapsulation for housing instrumentation lines, control lines, or instruments downhole. In one use, the encapsulation resides between an expandable downhole tool, such as an expandable sand screen, and the wall of the wellbore. The encapsulation is specially profiled to allow the downhole tool, e.g., *ESS*, to be expanded into the wall of the wellbore without leaving a channel outside of the tool through which formation fluids might vertically migrate. The encapsulation is useful in both cased hole and open hole completions. The profile is generally derived from the bore hole i.d. (or parent casing i.d.) and the o.d. of the expanded tubular.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0013] So that the manner in which the above recited features, advantages and objects of the present invention are attained and can be understood in detail, a more particular description of the invention, briefly summarized above, may be had by reference to the embodiments thereof which are illustrated in the appended drawings.

[0014] It is to be noted, however, that the appended drawings illustrate only typical embodiments of this invention and are therefore not to be considered limiting of its scope, for the invention may admit to other equally effective embodiments.

[0015] Figure 1 is a section view showing an open hole wellbore with a typical expandable sand screen and tubulars disposed therein. A profiled encapsulation of the present invention is shown in cross-section running from the surface to the depth of the

expandable completion.

[0016] Figure 2 is a top section view of an expandable sand screen completion within an open wellbore. The sand screen is in its unexpanded state. Visible is a top view of a profiled encapsulation of the present invention residing in the sand screen-formation annulus.

[0017] Figure 3 is a top section view of an expandable sand screen before expansion, and a blow-up view of a portion of the expandable sand screen.

[0018] Figure 4 is a top section view of an expandable sand screen within an open wellbore. The sand screen is in its expanded state. Visible is a top view of a profiled encapsulation of the present invention residing in the sand screen-formation annulus.

[0019] Figure 5 depicts the expandable sand screen of Figure 4, expanded against a cased hole wellbore.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENT

[0020] Figure 1 is a section view showing an open hole wellbore 40. The wellbore 40 includes a central wellbore which is lined with casing 42. The annular area between the casing 42 and the earth is filled with cement 46 as is typical in well completion. Extending downward from the central wellbore is an open hole wellbore 48. A formation 50 is shown adjacent the wellbore 48.

[0021] Disposed in the open wellbore 48 is a downhole tool 20 to be expanded. In the embodiment shown in FIG. 1, the tool 20 is an expandable sand screen (ESS®). However, the tool 20 could be any expandable downhole apparatus. An ESS 20 is hung within the wellbore 40 from a hanging apparatus 32. In some instances, the hanging apparatus is a packer (not shown). In the depiction of FIG. 1, the hanging apparatus is a liner 30 and liner hanger 32. A separate packer 34 may be employed to seal the annulus between the liner 30 and the production tubular 44.

[0022] Also depicted in FIG. 1 is an encapsulation 10 of the present invention. The encapsulation 10 is shown running from the surface to the liner hanger 32. The

encapsulation **10** is secured to the production tubular **44** by clamps, shown schematically at **18**. Clamps **18** are typically secured to the production tubular **44** approximately every ten meters. The clamps **18** are designed to expand with the tool **20** when it is expanded. The encapsulation **10** passes through the liner hanger **32** (or utilized hanging apparatus), and extends downward to a designated depth within the wellbore **40**. In the embodiment shown in **FIG. 1**, the encapsulation **10** extends into the annular region (shown as **28** in **FIG. 2**) between the expandable sand screen **20** and the open hole wellbore **48**. Note that the expandable sand screen **20** of **Figure 1** has already been expanded against the open hole formation **50** so that no annular region remains. The *ESS* **20** is thus in position for production of hydrocarbons.

[0023] **Figure 2** presents a top section view of an encapsulation **10** of the present invention. The encapsulation **10** resides in this depiction within an open hole wellbore **48**. As in **Figure 1**, the encapsulation **10** is disposed in the annular region **28** defined by the expandable sand screen **20** and the formation wall **48**. The encapsulation **10** is designed to serve as a housing for control lines or instrumentation lines **62** or control instrumentation (not shown). For purposes of this application, such lines **62** include any type of data acquisition lines, communication lines, fiber optics, cables, sensors, and downhole "smart well" features. The encapsulation **10** may optionally also house metal tubulars **60** for holding such control or instrumentation lines **62**.

[0024] The encapsulation **10** is specially profiled to closely fit between the sand screen **20** and the surrounding formation wall **48** after the sand screen **20** has been expanded. In this way, no vertical channel is left within the annular region **28** after the sand screen **20** is been expanded. To accomplish this, an arcuate configuration is employed for the encapsulation **20** whereby at least one of the walls **12** and **14** is arcuate in shape. In the preferred embodiment shown in **FIG. 2**, both walls **12** and **14** are arcuate such that a crescent-shape profile is defined. Thus, the encapsulation **10** shown in **FIG. 2** comprises a first arcuate wall **12** and a second arcuate wall **14** sharing a first end **15'** and a second end **15''**. However, it is only necessary that the outside wall **12** be arcuate in design.

[0025] The encapsulation **10** is normally fabricated from a thermoplastic material which is durable enough to withstand abrasions while being run into the wellbore **40**. At the same time, the encapsulation **10** material must be sufficiently malleable to allow the encapsulation to generally deform to the contour of the wellbore **48**. This prevents annular flow behind the sand screen **20**. The encapsulation **10** is preferably clamped to the expandable tubular **20** by expandable clamps (not shown). The expandable clamps are designed to provide minimal restriction to the tubular i.d.

[0026] In **FIG. 2**, the sand screen **20** is in its unexpanded state. In the embodiment of **FIG. 2**, the sand screen **20** is constructed from three composite layers. These define a slotted structural base pipe **22**, a layer of filter media **24**, and an outer encapsulating and protecting shroud **26**. Both the base pipe **22** and the outer shroud **26** are configured to permit hydrocarbons to flow therethrough, such as through slots (e.g., **23**) or perforations formed therein. The filter material **24** is held between the base pipe **22** and the outer shroud **26**, and serves to filter sand and other particulates from entering the sand screen **20** and the production tubular **44**. The sand screen **20** typically is manufactured in sections which can be joined end-to-end at the well-site during downhole completion. It is within the scope of this invention to employ an encapsulation **10** with one or more sections of expandable sand screen **20** or other expandable downhole tool.

[0027] In **Figure 3**, the sand screen **20** is again shown in cross-section. A portion **20e** of the sand screen **20** is shown in an expanded state, to demonstrate that the sand screen **20** remains sand tight after expansion. (Note that the expanded depiction is not to scale.) Radial force applied to the inner wall of the base pipe **22** forces the pipe **22** past its elastic limits and also expands the diameter of the base pipe perforations **23**. Also expanded is the shroud **26**. As shown in **Figure 4**, the shroud **26** is expanded to a point of contact with the wellbore **48**. Substantial contact between the sand screen **20** and the wellbore wall **48** places a slight stress on the formation **50**, reducing the risk of particulate matter entering the wellbore **48**. It also reduces the risk of vertical fluid flow behind the sand screen **20**.

SUBA 17 [0028] ~~Figure 4 is a top section view illustrating the wellbore 48 and the sand screen 20 expanded therein. Expansion is within the open wellbore 48 of FIG. 2. Visible is the top view of a profiled encapsulation of the present invention residing in the sand screen-formation annulus 28. The encapsulation 10 has been expanded by a conformed cone or roller apparatus or other expander tool (not shown) to provide a close fit between the sand screen 20 and the formation 48 such that no annular region 28 remains as would permit measurable vertical fluid movement behind the sand screen 20.~~

SUBA 17 [0029] ~~Figure 5 depicts an expandable sand screen 20 expanded against a cased hole wellbore. Casing is shown as 52, and the cement is shown as 56. The casing 52 is perforated 53 to allow hydrocarbons to pass into and through the sand screen 20. This demonstrates that the encapsulation 10 of the present invention has application to a cased hole completion as well as an open hole completion. Those of ordinary skill in the art will appreciate that hydrocarbons will enter the casing through perforations (not shown).~~

[0031] While the foregoing is directed to embodiments of the present invention, other and further embodiments of the invention may be devised without departing from the basic scope thereof, and the scope thereof is determined by the claims that follow.